



## **GEORGE HITTNER: Speed cameras in school zones can help avoid tragedies**

George Hittner  
Thursday, July 3, 2014

In a recent misguided rant against school zone speed safety cameras, a writer would have us believe our children are perfectly safe walking to school. If that were the true, 20 mph school zones and crossing guards would be unnecessary and parents, teachers and police would not need to remind children again and again to look both ways before crossing the street.

That place may exist but as someone who was born and grew up in Texas, I think we all know it's not like that here.

According to the Transportation Research Board, a research and advisory division of the National Research Council, an average of more than 100 children are killed while walking to and from school, and another 25,000 are injured each year in our country.

Included among this year's statistics are three children from the Texas communities of Laredo and Katy. In April, a pickup struck 11-year-old Alfredo Lopez as he walked home from school at 4 p.m. in Laredo. He was airlifted to a San Antonio hospital for care.

The same month, two students in Katy were bicycling home when a car hit them, sending both to the hospital. They were 12 and 13 years old.

These tragedies will not diminish without continuous effort on our part. Improvement came this year when state lawmakers banned drivers from using cellphones in school zones. Now, Tom Green County commissioners are considering the installation of school zone speed cameras, a step that is clearly within their legal authority.

According to the Texas Transportation Code, county commissioners have the authority to regulate traffic on any road in the county or on county property that is under the jurisdiction of the commissioners court; and adopt regulations establishing a system of traffic control devices in restricted traffic zones on any road in the county. This safety measure is a legitimate response to a genuine danger.

A sampling of news reports reveals how widespread and persistent the problem is. For instance: The Reporter-News in Abilene reported that from 2006-2009, police wrote 500 citation for motorists traveling over the speed limit in school zones; The Dallas Morning News in 2012 reported 80 children struck by vehicles during last school year received treatment at Children's Medical Center Dallas — that year a vehicle hit a middle school student in Hewitt while the youth bicycled home from school, according to KWKT-TV FOX 44; Borderzine.com reported El Paso Municipal Court issued more than 11,100 speeding tickets in or near school zones. And in Tyler, in 2013, there were nearly 3,000 speed violations in school zones.

Does anyone really believe the children in Tom Green County are exempt from this danger? School zone speed safety cameras pose no threat to drivers who obey the law, yet they offer great protection to students from drivers who disregard the law.

With speed safety cameras in place near schools in Portland, Oregon, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found 9.5 percent of drivers exceeded the posted 20 mph speed limit illuminated with flashing yellow lights by more than 5 mph. Without cameras, 30.4 percent of traffic exceeded the speed limit by more than 5 mph. With cameras, 2.3 percent of drivers exceeded the speed limit by more than 10 mph; without cameras 25.6 percent exceeded the limit by more than 10 mph.

Research shows drivers behave differently when they are held accountable for their actions. The Texas Transportation Institute surveyed 12 Texas police agencies and had them rate driver compliance with school zone speed limits when police are present and when they are not visible. On average, the agencies rated driver compliance at 94 percent with police present, but 66 percent when authorities are not visible.

If taxpayers are willing to dedicate police resources to monitor school zones to achieve voluntary compliance with the law, student safety can be improved. Few communities, however, are so inclined.

School zone speed safety cameras provide the Tom Green County Commissioners Court with the opportunity to take a proactive step to ensure the safety of children against a culture of drivers who are increasingly distracted and rushed. This is a sensible action to take that will improve the safety precautions in place for the most innocent among us.

*George Hittner is General Counsel for American Traffic Solutions Inc. in Tempe, Arizona.*

<http://www.gosanangelo.com/news/2014/jul/03/speed-cameras-in-school-zones-can-helpavoid/?partner=RSS>